

Testimony of Mary H. Silverberg
Before the Appropriations Human Services Subcommittee
March 4, 2011
Against Governor's S.B. 1012

Good evening Senator Prague, Representatives Hamm and Villano and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you tonight. My name is Mary Silverberg and I am here to speak against Governor's Bill 1012, in support of Connecticut's Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BSBY) remaining a stand-alone agency. I am a speech/language pathologist who has worked full time in the Connecticut public schools for 34 years, and since retiring four years ago, have been able to continue working with students part time. I am also legally blind.

BSBE is the only public agency in Connecticut that provides a full range of services to the blind and visually impaired. The agency's primary goal is to assist its clients in establishing and maintaining the highest level of independent living as possible, regardless of age or whether the vision loss is congenital or acquired later in life.

BSBE assisted me some 40 years ago to obtain my Master's Degree in Communication Disorders. This has provided me with a lifetime career in a field I am passionate about and has kept me employed and independent even in my post retirement years. Since attending graduate school in Connecticut, BSBE's Adult Services and Vocational Rehabilitation departments have provided me with the tools and skills needed to enter, remain, then re-enter the work force at every stage of my life. Low vision services have included magnification devices, software and training. This has made it possible for me to communicate and function productively in today's marketplace, and most recently, engage with the world via the Internet. After raising a family and losing my husband of 33 years, remaining independent has also allowed me to give back to my community. I am currently the chair of West Hartford's Advisory Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

As we age, our independence becomes threatened. The problem is, increased dependence on multiple social service agencies further depletes a system already stretched to its limits. And when people at any age are no longer active and engaged, they become isolated and ill, requiring an increased level of services and drawing heavily on our healthcare system. What we need are agencies and services that empower people such as myself to remain active, so they can be minimally reliant on the services of the state and can give back to their communities, even as they get older. BSBY is the one public agency that addresses the specific needs of blind and visually impaired persons throughout the changing stages of a lifetime. Disbanding this agency would bring to its clients and their families isolation, limited opportunities and resources, as well as fragmented services without the continuity of support which is currently available. In closing, I urge you to allow BSBE to stand alone in order to continue helping children and adults to live as independently as possible, for their sake and for the sake of our communities.

Thank you again for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Mary H. Silverberg